

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

ST. MARY'S CHURCH IN OXFORD,

ON THURSDAY, JULY 1, 1779.

ON OCCASION

OF THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

G O V E R N O R S

OF THE

RADCLIFFE INFIRMARY:

BY LEWIS BAGOT, L.L.D.

DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOVERNORS,
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHARITY.

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TO THE
P R E S I D E N T
AND
G O V E R N O R S
OF THE
RADCLIFFE INFIRMARY,

THIS SERMON,
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED.

513

TO THE

P R E S I D E N T

AND

G O V E R N O R

OF THE

R A D C L I F F E I N F I R M A R Y

I N T H E S T A T E O F

P R I N T E D A T T H E I R P R E S S

I N H O S T E L S E V E R A L L Y

MATT. IX. 4, 5.

JESUS KNOWING THEIR THOUGHTS, SAID;
 WHEREFORE THINK YE EVIL IN YOUR
 HEARTS? FOR WHETHER IS EASIER,
 TO SAY, THY SINS BE FORGIVEN THEE;
 OR TO SAY, ARISE AND WALK?

JESUS had said to the Sick of the Palsy, "Be of
 good cheer; thy Sins are forgiven thee." When certain of the Scribes, on hearing this authori-
 tative Declaration, said within themselves, "This
 Man blasphemeth: Who can forgive Sins but God
 alone?" they conceived that they had clear ground
 whereon to convict this humble Teacher of the
 most extravagant Arrogance and Presumption. In
 this they were mistaken; and the Event, had they
 been in a disposition to have admitted such instruc-
 tion, might have taught them that they were so.
 The Proposition however, that God alone could for-
 give Sins, was in itself indisputably true. Their
 mistake

mistake lay in not rightly apprehending the necessary connection of the Sin of Man, and all the variety of misery and wretchedness he is subject to in the World. Had they been properly aware of this they must have acknowledged, that the same Power which alone could remit the one, was requisite effectually to remove the other; and consequently that it was in fact one and the same thing to say to the poor Paralytic, "Thy Sins are forgiven thee," and to say, "Arise and walk." Which ever expression were made use of, the inference from the effect must be the same. Are we then to imagine, that it was on account of any extraordinary sinfulness of his own that this wretch had been so grievously afflicted; or that he was a Sinner even above these Scribes, who, sworn with worldly prosperity and a conceit of their own righteousness, saw with an evil eye the hand of Mercy extended to him? No, we have no warrant for such conclusion: what he had suffered was but the common Lot of Human Nature.

The moment a Man becomes capable of reflecting on himself, on his own State, and that of his fellow-creatures, he will be struck with the calamities he either feels or apprehends in his own person; and of which

which he certainly sees numberless examples around him. To exclude the hand of Providence from any share in such events, would be in fact to deny all interference of Providence whatever in human affairs, to question God's Moral Government of the World; and with the lowest Class of heathen Dogmatists to remove the Creator from all care of his Works. Yet to reconcile all this with the notion of a wise, and good, and just arrangement, has puzzled the Philosophy of all ages. The several absurd systems which men have been led to adopt on this account, are so many proofs that it is a question not to be resolved at any rate by the collections of mere human Reason. Were there any stated and equitable rule to be observed in the distribution of the common calamities of life, they might then be considered as special tokens of the offended Justice of God; as exemplary judgments called down by the crying offences of the Sinner. But it is evident, on the slightest inspection, that they fall like the Rain from Heaven alike on the evil and the good. Thus it is that Natural Reason, so far from furnishing us with any true System of Religion, cannot help us one step forward, cannot satisfy us with respect to the visible effects of God's Providence in the World; and without some satisfaction

faction on that head, it is impossible to have any Religion at all. The Holy Psalmist lived under a Dispensation where public Calamities and public Blessings were the declared Sanctions of the Law; and ever followed in just proportion the Rebellion and Obedience of the People. Yet when he considered the case of individuals, the prosperity of some and the wretchedness of others, his own mind could afford him no comfort or satisfaction: Nay, his thoughts on the subject for a moment nearly overset his Faith, "His feet were almost gone, his treadings had wellnigh slip'd *," till he recollected with that humility which is the genuine temper of a Religious Soul, that the Question was above his Natural Powers. "Then thought I to understand this (he says) but it was too hard for me, until I went into the Sanctuary of God †." Then all his difficulties vanished; His own chastisement all the day long, and the uninterrupted prosperity of the wicked no longer disturbed his Peace. He acknowledged his ignorance and foolishness; and rested his confidence and comfort upon God. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee: My flesh and my heart faileth;

* Ps. lxxiii. 2. † Ib. ver. 15, 16.

* faileth ; But God is the strength of my heart and
 * my portion for ever *.” What our true situation
 here is we can know from God only, and in what
 relation we stand both to him and to each other. This
 knowlege, so far as it concerns us to have it, he hath
 revealed unto us. We are taught by the Scriptures
 that we are in a fallen and degraded state ; degraded by
 Sin, and therefore justly liable to wrath. We are taught
 likewise to expect Mercy not for any merit of our
 own, but through an all-sufficient Atonement on
 the prescribed conditions of Faith and Obedience.

IN such a state as this the transient Evils of the
 World, convey no imputation on the Justice or Good-
 ness of God, though distributed without regard to
 the personal characters of Men. They are trials, or
 fatherly Corrections, and not condign Punishments.
 Conclusions therefore, with respect to the state of
 Individuals in God's Estimation or Favour, cannot
 hence be fairly deduced. For we know “ whom God
 loveth he chasteneth ; and scourgeth every Son whom
 he receiveth †.” When some of the Jews therefore in-
 sinuated inferences of such sort, our Lord with great
 dignity rebuked their want of Charity, and warned
 them, that the right use to be made of such disasters,

* Pl. lxxiii. 24, 25.

† Hebr. xii. 6.

was to judge themselves and not others : " Except
 " ye repent ye shall all likewise perish *." Agreeably
 indeed to that divine arrangement which is sketched
 out to us in God's Word, the Sorrows and Miseries
 of Life, considered as the common Lot of all, as
 our proper inheritance here, are tokens that all are
 Sinners, and evidences of God's general condemna-
 tion of Sin ; the actual Punishment of it is reserved
 for another state of things. These Evils however,
 for Evils in themselves they certainly are, and great
 ones too, are capable of being turned, as all God's
 Dispensations to his creatures are, to the advance-
 ment of our most substantial happiness. If they con-
 tribute to convince us of our own weakness and fin-
 fulness, they so far tend to produce in us that humi-
 lity of Soul, which is the only temper suited to our
 present circumstances, the only temper with which
 the Blessings and Graces of the Gospel can consist.
 If they excite our compassion, and raise in us a sym-
 pathy and commiseration for the sufferings of our
 fellow-creatures ; this is a step towards that Benevo-
 lence which is the blessed character of the Kingdom
 of Heaven, and which Sin alone hath banished from
 the Earth. The quick emotions of our own hearts
 at the sight of misery, seem strongly to intimate to

* Luke xiii. 3.

us the fitness of communicating such relief as we can. But if we would see this matter as a Duty enforced and exemplified in the most affecting manner, we must have recourse to the Gospel, to the Life and Conduct of him who died for us, "who bore our "griefs and carried our sorrows*," who made the mercies which he wrought on the afflicted bodies of men, the happy earnest of that Redemption which should be obtained for their Souls by his most precious Blood. Our blessed Lord, in the short continuance of his ministry on earth, had much to do. He made it his business not only to evidence the divine authority of his Law by such works as none but God could effect; but also to give an example of the true spirit and practice of it in his own Life. He therefore so ordered his conduct, that both designs should be promoted together.

THE very works which bare witness of his Power, were at the same time eminent instances of his Mercy and Loving-kindness. The Power manifested in them might go to convince the minds of men of his high character; but could not possibly be the objects of their imitation; the benevolent tendency of them might. It is in the attribute of Mercy that the Di-

* Isaiah liii. 4.

vine Nature is more especially proposed as our pattern. In this sense it is that Christ says to us, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect *." There is scarce a miracle recorded of Jesus where this is not the prevailing character. And when he was once urged by his Disciples to exert his Power in another manner, "He turned and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Men's Lives, but to save them †." The consequences of Sin on our nature (and to this account, as I have shewn, all the Misery in the world is to be placed) were the peculiar objects of his compassion. It was the declared end of his ministry "to take away the Sins of the world ‡," to destroy their Power, and remove their effects, in whatever shape they might appear. Among these, their visible operation by Disease and Death on our mortal Bodies here, was the most striking. In obviating this, therefore, he was continually employed: The Blind were restored to their sight; The Lame walked; The Deaf heard; Lepers were cleansed; The Dead were raised; Palsy, Fever, Epilepsy, Lunacy, every the most dreadful and obstinate malady to which our frame is subject, whether from the concurrence of

* Matt. v. 48.

† Luke ix. 55.

‡ John i. 9.

what are called natural causes, or from the permitted influence of malicious Spirits, was removed at his gracious and powerful word.

To acts such as these he appealed, as the most genuine testimony of his character and pretensions. And acts such as these were therefore first predicted and afterwards recorded of him, that we might love and imitate as well as believe him.

If we are sincere in professing ourselves to be his Disciples, the same Spirit must reign in our hearts which was also in him: and the only proof we can give of this, is by directing our powers, as far as they extend, to the same gracious ends which he did. The more to induce us to this, he made the cause of the wretched his own; and taught us to expect, that at the last day account shall be taken of our conduct towards *them* as referred to himself; and that all other pretences which we may set up of our attachment and relation to him, and our title to his promises, will only bring upon us that dreadful sentence from our great Judge, "I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity *." Considering who it is that hath given us this solemn warning,

* Matt. vii. 23.

and what he hath done for us, it is impossible to press the sense of this duty on our understanding and feelings in a more forcible manner.

THE Pagan moralists could themselves see but a little way into this Duty: Their arguments and persuasions are consequently limited by their own contracted views of the subject. The modern Deists, the admired Philosophers of the present day, who are distinguished from the Pagans chiefly by a wilful rejection of that Light which never shone upon the other: with all their boast of enlarged sentiment and refined humanity, can go no farther on this enchanting Topic than cold scepticism; of which the utmost that can be pretended is, "that it may amuse a few inquisitive minds*." It can never be a steady principle of action, it can never elevate or improve the heart. But to leave these to their amusement, such as it is, and return to more useful and comfortable reflections. We have not, it is true, the same power of Life and Health that resided in our great Master; but something, nevertheless, may be done by human means. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," is the sentence of every man living. An

* See Gibbon, p. 504. 1st Edit. exertion

exertion in some shape or other of those Powers, both of Body and Mind, with which God hath furnished us, is indispensably requisite to the continual support of our Lives. The course of nature is so ordered, that every comfort and outward satisfaction we can enjoy here must be the fruit of human industry. By exertions of this kind, directed to a nice and accurate observation of the human frame, of the relation which other parts of nature, animal, vegetable, or mineral bear to it, and the effects generally wrought on it by various applications of them, in this way, from the joint experience and labours of successive ages, rational systems have been formed, calculated to afford, by God's Blessing, certain relief and comfort under the several painful diseases incident to us in this Life. The knowledge of these Systems is itself a noble Science, not to be attained without a considerable Proficiency in every part of human Learning : and the skill of applying them in practice, requires a natural penetration and sagacity that is by no means the talent of every man. Such knowledge must, from the nature of things, be confined to few ; but the benefits arising from it may, by other exertions, be extended far and wide : an Institution calculated for the purpose of extending them

them to every part of the human Species, to those especially who groan under the accumulated load of Poverty and Disease, breathes the genuine spirit of that Religion which is from above, and as far as mere human Works can go, is an imitation of its great Author. In the distribution of private and merely personal Charities, there is a pleasing gratification of the Passion excited by the present object. It is hard to recommend any restraint on the best propensities of our nature; yet circumstanced as the world now is, some care is requisite, that in our endeavours to relieve distress we do not minister to Vice and Idleness. The Idea of a public Infirmary originates from a calm and dispassionate sense of the common infirmities of our nature, without respect of persons: to contribute to the support of it is therefore an instance of the most unbounded benevolence, in which we are not liable to be misled either by our own passion and prejudice, or by the artifice of others. Such too are the regulations by which that in this place is ordered, that we have the most comfortable assurance, that our benevolent assistance cannot be misapplied. By this means too our Charity, as it ever ought, is made to respect the Souls as well as Bodies of Men. In consequence of the instruction
of

of pious and godly Ministers, at times when men's hearts are softened by pain and affliction; of stated attendance on Divine Worship, and an orderly and decent deportment in every other respect, all which is here more effectually provided for than in any other Institution of the kind; it may safely be affirmed, that of many thousands relieved, by far the greater part have left the House, no less improved in their Morals and Religion than in their bodily Health. It is a farther advantage belonging to an Infirmary in this place above others, that it evidently tends to the advancement of the Science of Medicine itself; especially as it is now circumstanced, by means of the judicious generosity of the late Chancellor of this University. That this generosity should answer the ends for which it was designed we have every reason to hope, when we consider that the particular direction of it is at present in the hands of men whose attachment to the cause of Learning and Humanity, as well as their ability to promote it, is unquestionable *.

I HAVE now laid before you such considerations as point out the true nature of Human Evils. I have shewn from the Gospel History what was the practice

* See Extract of the Will annexed.

of Christ himself, what is the spirit of his Religion, and consequently what is our duty with respect to them. I have shewn that the support of a public Infirmary is an exercise of that Duty in its true spirit and fullest extent. I have hinted at some advantages peculiar to that founded in this place. It only remains, that under the impress of these thoughts we pray to the Giver of every good gift to dispose our hearts, so to employ the abundance of his Blessings here, to the relief of our necessitous and afflicted Brethren, that we may at the last day give a clear account of the Talents committed to us, and be found worthy, with the blessed addition of "Good and faithful Servants," to enter into the joy of our Lord.

University. That this generosity should arise from ends for which it was designed we have every reason to hope; when we consider that the particular direction of it is at present in the hands of men whose attachment to the cause of Learning and Humanity, as well as their ability to promote it, is undoubted. I have now laid before you such considerations as point out the true nature of Human Benevolence. I have shewn how the Gospel History itself was the source

Extract from the Will of GEORGE HENRY,
Earl of *Litchfield*, Chancellor of the Uni-
versity of *Oxford*.

“ AND as for and concerning my Leasehold House,
“ wherein I now reside, in Hill-street, I give and
“ bequeath the same, and Goods and Furniture which shall
“ be therein at the Time of my Decease (except my Plate)
“ to Henry Watkin Dashwood, Esq; eldest Son of Sir James
“ Dashwood, of Norbrook in the County of Oxford, Bart,
“ and William Ashurst, of Lincoln's Inn in the County of
“ Middlesex, Esq; (my Executors hereafter named) upon
“ the Trusts hereafter mentioned, that is to say, in Trust
“ to permit and suffer my now Wife, the Countess of *Litch-*
“ *field*, to reside in and have the Use of my said House
“ and the Goods and Furniture therein, for and during so long
“ Time as she shall remain a Widow and unmarried, with
“ Liberty to change or alter the same, leaving other Fur-
“ niture of equal Value in lieu thereof, and giving Notice
“ thereof to my Executors hereafter named. And I do
“ hereby direct my Executors hereafter named, with all
“ convenient Speed after my Decease, to cause an Inventory
“ of such Goods and Furniture to be taken and made, and
“ that my said Wife do sign a Receipt for the same at the
“ Foot of such Inventory. And from and after her Decease
“ or Marriage (which ever shall first happen) I do hereby
“ will and direct my said Executors hereafter named, with
“ all convenient Speed, to sell and dispose of the said House,
“ Goods, and Furniture, for as much Money as can reason-
“ ably be got for the same, and to pay the clear Money arising
“ from such Sale to the then Chancellor of the University of
“ Oxford, the then Bishop of Oxford, and the then Presi-
“ dent of St. John's College in Oxford, upon the Trusts
“ hereafter mentioned. And when any one or more of them
“ shall happen to die, I do hereby will and direct, that his
“ and their Successor and Successors in Office for the Time
“ being shall at all Times hereafter be and remain, together
“ with the Survivor or Survivors of them, my Trustee and
“ Trustees for the Purposes hereafter mentioned. And I do

" hereby authorize, empower, and direct; the Survivor and
 " Survivors of them, from Time to Time, to do all and
 " every Act and Acts that may be necessary, for the more
 " effectual vesting in and assigning to such new Trustee or
 " Trustees the said Trust Monies: Which said Monies are
 " so given to them as a Fund for the Foundation of a Pro-
 " fessorship in the said University, for the reading of Clinical
 " Lectures in Physic in the Hospital or Infirmary in the said
 " City of Oxford to the Students in Physic in the said Uni-
 " versity; such Professor to be chosen in by the Members of
 " Convocation. Provided nevertheless, that no Person shall
 " be eligible thereto, who shall not have taken a Doctor's
 " Degree in Physic for five Years at the least before such
 " his Election. And I do hereby will and direct, that my
 " said Trustees for the Time being shall, from Time to
 " Time, place out and invest the said Trust Monies in Go-
 " vernment or Parliamentary Securities at Interest; and that
 " they shall and may, from Time to Time, change, vary,
 " and alter, such Securities as to them in their Discretion
 " shall seem meet. And that they shall and do, from Time
 " to Time, pay the Interest and Produce thereof to the
 " Professor for the Time being, to be chosen as aforesaid,
 " And I do hereby direct, that my said Trustees, or any of
 " them, shall not be answerable for any Loss or Losses that
 " may happen of such Trust Monies, or any Part thereof,
 " so as the same happen without their wilful Default. Ne-
 " vertheless my Will is, that such Foundation shall be subject
 " to such Rules, Orders, and Directions, as shall be at any
 " Time hereafter by me declared and directed by any Codi-
 " cil to this my Will, or other Writing by me signed for
 " that Purpose; and for want of such direction, to be sub-
 " ject to such Rules, Orders, and Directions, as shall at any
 " Time be made by my said Trustees in that Behalf."

*The Sale of the above demised House and Furniture, after the
 Death of the late Countess Dowager of Litchfield, produced, clear
 of all Expenses and Deductions, 4256l. 8s. 2d. This Sum
 was vested in the Three per Cent. Consols and purchased
 7079l. 5s. 4d. Stock. The Interest whereof amounts annually
 to 212l. 10s.*

